



Inside Ag

May 2010

Weed Alert ***Cardaria draba***



Very soon, clusters of white flowers will start to appear along roadsides and waterways. Those white flowers belong to the noxious weed hoary cress (*Cardaria draba*). Hoary cress, also known as whitetop, is a creeping perennial that has numerous small, white flowers with 4 petals on stalks radiating from a two foot stem. Seed capsules are heart-shaped with two small, flat, reddish brown seeds. One plant can produce from 1,200 to 4,800 seeds. The plants emerge in early spring with stems emerging from the center of each rosette in late April. Hoary cress flowers from May to June and plants set seed by mid-summer.

Hoary cress is a member of the mustard (Brassicaceae) family which includes cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower. It is native to western Mediterranean countries and the Middle East (Turkey, Israel, Syria, Iraq and Iran). Hoary cress probably entered North America in contaminated alfalfa seed. It was first found at Long Island, New York, in 1862. This weed is now introduced on every continent.



Habitats for hoary Cress include: fields, waste places, meadows, pastures, croplands and along roadsides. It is typically found on unshaded, generally open areas of disturbed ground. It typically does better with moderate amounts of precipitation and grows well on alkaline soils. The Front Range has significant hoary cress infestations along the South Platte River and roadsides. Other areas in Colorado dealing with major hoary cress problems are the San Luis Valley and western counties such as Routt, Garfield, and Mesa.



The key to effective control of hoary cress is prevention. Preventing the encroachment of these weeds is the most cost-effective management. Prevent invasions by limiting seed dispersal, monitoring and using weed free hay, and quarantine animals that may have grazed in infested areas. Beyond prevention, the key is early detection when infestations are small and aggressive management efforts are in place. Hoary cress is designated as a "List B" species in the Colorado Noxious Weed Act. It is required to be eradicated, contained, or suppressed depending on the local infestations.